

Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

- He was an 18th century poet best known for his satirical verse as well as his translation of Homer.
- He is famous for using heroic couplet.
- He is the second-most frequently quoted writer in the Oxford Dictionary of Quotation, after Shakespeare.
- Pope was born to Alexander Pope Senior who was a linen merchant.
- He was a Catholic, so his education was affected by 'Test Acts' which upheld the status of the established Church of England and banned Catholics from teaching, attending a university, voting, or holding public office.
- Initially he was taught by his aunt and later went to Catholic schools.
- In 1700, his family moved to Popeswood, because of strong anti-Catholic sentiment and a statute preventing Catholics from living within 10 miles (16 km) of either London or Westminster.
- Pope described the countryside around his house in "Windsor Forest".
- He educated himself by reading Horace and Juvenal, the epic poets Homer, Virgil, and English authors as Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dryden.
- Pope had a closed attachment with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and also had lifelong relationship with Martha Blount.
- 'The Translation of Homer' brought Pope a financial independence and became first professional poet.
- His famous work "The Rape of the Lock" is dedicated to John Caryl.
- The first major work of Pope is "The Pastorals".
- He was removed from the society as he was a Catholic.
- In May 1709 Pope's Pastorals was published in sixth part of Tonson's Poetical Miscellanies, when he was only 16 years old.
- In 1711 he wrote Essay on Criticism. (Don't confuse with Essay in Criticism by Mathew Arnold).
- His friends were Tory writers along with whom he formed Scriblerus Club in 1713:
 - John Gay
 - Jonathan Swift
 - Thomas Parnell and
 - John Arbuthnot
- The aim of the club was to satirize ignorance and pedantry in the form of fictional scholar Martinus Scriblerus.
- He also made friendship with Whig writers Addison and Steele.
- He translated Iliad of Homer.
- Jonathan Swift called Pope as "Paper saving Pope".
- "Pope could fix in one couplet more sense than I can do in six." – by Dr. Johnson.
- He has written a pamphlet on Shakespeare called 'Shakespeare Restored'.
- Pope was noted for his involvement in public feuds with the writers and publishers of low-end Grub Street, which led him to write The Dunciad (1728), a scathing account of England's cultural decline, and, at the end of his life, a series of related verse essays and Horatian satires that articulated and protested this decline.
- Pope is also remembered as the first full-time professional English writer, having supported himself largely on subscription fees for his popular translations of Homer and his edition of the works of William Shakespeare.
- He is recognized as a great formal master, an eloquent expositor of the spirit of his age, and a representative of the culture and politics of the Enlightenment.
- Pope published his first major work, An Essay on Criticism, at the age of 23.
- The mock epic The Rape of the Lock made Pope known to a general audience. Based on an actual incident in 1711, when Robert Lord Petre ("The Baron") publicly cut a lock of hair from the head of Arabella Fermor ("Belinda"), and said to have been written at the request of a friend to encourage a rapprochement between the families, the poem nimbly depicts the foibles of high society. At once light-hearted and serious, addressing both the flimsiness of social status and the repercussions of public behavior, the poem is an in-depth study of contemporary social mores and the reasons for their existence.

- Pope, Howard D. Weinbrot asserted, had a far wider satiric range than modern readers assume: he was “more eclectic, hostile, and both sublime and vulgar.”
- **From the Lives of the Poets by Samuel Johnson: Pope**
 - He writes, he says, when “he has just nothing else to do”; yet Swift complains that he was never at leisure for conversation because he “had always some poetical scheme in his head.”
 - Dobson, who spent some time at his house translating his Essay on Man, when I asked him what learning he found him to possess, answered, “More than I expected.” His frequent references to history, his allusions to various kinds of knowledge, and his images selected from art and nature, with his observations on the operations of the mind and the modes of life, show an intelligence perpetually on the wing, excursive, vigorous, and diligent, eager to pursue knowledge, and attentive to retain it.
 - Pope had likewise genius; a mind active, ambitious, and adventurous, always investigating, always aspiring; in its widest searches still longing to go forward, in its highest flights still wishing to be higher, always imagining some thing greater than it knows, always endeavouring more than it can do.
 - He considered poetry as the business of his life, and however he might seem to lament his occupation he followed it with constancy: to make verses was his first labour, and to mend them was his last.
 - His publications were for the same reason never hasty. He is said to have sent nothing to the press till it had lain two years under his inspection: it is at least certain that he ventured nothing without nice examination. He suffered the tumult of imagination to subside, and the novelties of invention to grow familiar. He knew that the mind is always enamoured of its own productions, and did not trust his first fondness. He consulted his friends, and listened with great willingness to criticism; and, what was of more importance, he consulted himself, and let nothing pass against his own judgment.
 - One of his greatest though of his earliest works is the Essay on Criticism, which if he had written nothing else would have placed him among the first critics and the first poets, as it exhibits every mode of excellence that can embellish or dignify didactic composition, selection of matter, novelty of arrangement, justness of precept, splendour of illustration, and propriety of digression.
 - Pope brought into view a new race of beings, with powers and passions proportionate to their operation. The sylphs and gnomes act at the toilet and the tea-table what more terrific and more powerful phantoms perform on the stormy ocean or the field of battle: they give their proper help and do their proper mischief. Pope is said by an objector not to have been the inventor of this petty nation; a charge which might with more justice have been brought against the author of the Iliad, who doubtless adopted the religious system of his country; for what is there but the names of his agents which Pope has not invented? Has he not assigned them characters and operations never heard of before? Has he not, at least, given them their first poetical existence? If this is not sufficient to denominate his work original, nothing original ever can be written.
 - In this work [The Rape of the Lock] are exhibited in a very high degree the two most engaging powers of an author: new things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new. A race of aerial people never heard of before is presented to us in a manner so clear and easy that the reader seeks for no further information, but immediately mingles with his new acquaintance, adopts their interests, and attends their pursuits, loves a sylph, and detests a gnome. That familiar things are made new every paragraph will prove. The subject of the poem is an event below the common incidents of common life; nothing real is introduced that is not seen so often as to be no longer regarded; yet the whole detail of a female-day is here brought before us, invested with so much art of decoration that, though nothing is disguised, everything is striking, and we feel all the appetite of curiosity for that from which we have a thousand times turned fastidiously away.
 - The purpose of the poet is, as he tells us, to laugh at “*the little unguarded follies of the female sex.*”

- poetical wonder, the translation of the Iliad, a performance which no age or nation can pretend to equal.
- If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found? To circumscribe poetry by a definition will only show the narrowness of the definer, though a definition which shall exclude Pope will not easily be made.

Essay on Criticism (1711)

- It is written in 3 parts.
- He took three years to complete this poem, and published in 1711.
- This poem was an attempt to identify and refine his own positions as a poet and critic.
- The poem is a response to a question of whether poetry should be natural or written according to predetermined artificial rules inherited from the classical past. Pope exhorts his fellow poets to “follow nature”.
- Pope comments on the classical authors who dealt with such standards and the authority should be accredited to them as per him.
- The final section discussed the moral qualities and virtues inherent in the ideal critic who are also an ideal man.
- Essay on Criticism has three parts.
- In the third part, Pope offers a tribute to Longinus: “The bold Longinus, all the nine inspire.”
- In this poem he also attacked John Dennis as “Appius” and finally a brief history from Aristotle to William Walsh.

Important Quotes:

“Little knowledge is a dangerous thing”

“To err is human and to forgive divine”

“True wit is nature to advantage dressed; what oft was thought, but never so well expressed.”

“Authors are partial to their wit, ‘tis true; but are not critics to their judgment, too?”

“Words are like Leaves; and where they must abound; Much Fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.”

“First follow nature and your judgment frame. By her just standard, which is still the same”.

“Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”

The Rape of the Lock (1712 & 1714)

- It is a mock-heroic narrative poem first published anonymously in Lintott's Miscellaneous Poems in 1712 in 2 cantos.
- It is also an example of high Burlesque.
- It was expanded and re-issued in an addition “Written by Mr. Pope” in 1714 in 5 cantos, accompanied by 6 engravings.
- The final form of the poem was available in 1717 with the addition of Clarissa's speech on good humour.
- The Poem was based on actual incident recounted by Pope's friend John Caryl, Arabella Fermor, and her suitor Lord Petre from Catholic families who suffered legal restrictions and penalties.
- Petre, lusting Arabella had cut off a lock of her hair without her permission and the consequent argument had created a breach between the two families.
- Pope added the second edition, a dedicatedly letter to Arabella Fermor.
- Pope has used Supernatural Machinery in this poem.

Plot

- In the beginning of the poem, Pope declared that a “dire offence” has been committed. A Lord assaults a gentle belle and then he proceeds to tell the story.
- It begins with Belinda still asleep.
- Belinda's dog name is Shock.
- Her guardian ‘Sylph’ named Ariel warns her while she sleeps, that some dread event is going to take place that morning but heaven does not reveal how and where.

- Belinda then wakes up and gets ready for the day with the help of her maid Betty. Sylphs also contributes in her dress up.
- Belinda appears very beautiful as she journeys to Hampton Court.
- Here Pope describes Belinda's two locks of hair as "which graceful hung behind".
- The Baron, one of Belinda's suitors greatly admires these locks and conspire to steal one and possess it for the long time.
- Ariel is disturbed by this event and summons many Sylphs and instructs them to guard Belinda from anything that may befall her.
- These spirit hovers over Belinda when she reaches Hampton Court. There she is invited to play a game of Ombre, which she wins.
- The Baron conspires to get her lock. When he tries to cut her lock he is intervened by blowing back of the hair and snatching the diamond in her ear, thus Baron fails in his first attempt.
- Belinda thus looked around and Baron's plan is failed and this happens three times but in the fourth attempt he manages to cut off the lock. In doing so he cut a Sylph also in two but as an airy substance, Sylph soon unites again.
- A gnome named Umbriel journeys to the cave of Spleen and from Queen he receives a bag of "sighs, sobs, and passions, and the war of tongues" and a glass filled with "fainting fears, soft sorrows, melting grieves, and flowing tears" and brings them to Belinda.
- Many people are moved by Belinda's grief and they demand the lock of hair back but Baron refuses.
- Clarissa directs them to keep their good humour but they don't listen and called her 'prude'.
- All the men started a court battle with weapons as glares, songs, and wits.
- Belinda throws snuff in Baron's nose to subdue him.
- She threatens him to kill with a bodkin (a sharp hair pin).
- She demands that he should restore the lock but they soon discover that it has been lost.
- They search everywhere for it but can't find it.
- At the end Pope tells us that Belinda's Lock of hair must have become a star. Even when we all are dead and gone, Belinda's lock of hair shall live on forever.
- The lock is actually cut in 3rd canto.
- Pope continuously compares Belinda with sun.
- Total numbers of lines in The Rape of the Lock are 794.
- The Supernatural Machinery in this poem is taken from "Le Comte de Gabalis" authored by Abbe Nicolas-Pierre-Henri de Montfaucon de Villars.
- Rape of the Lock is inspired by:
 - Tassoni's – Rape of a Bucket
 - Vida's – Game of Chess
 - Boileau's – Le Lutrin
- Dr. Johnson on Pope (in Life of Pope) – "If Pope be not a poet where is poetry to be found."
- Pope also contributed to Joseph Addison's "The Tatler".
- Dr. Johnson acclaimed "Translation of Iliad" as "a performance which no age or nation could hope to equal".
- In Ode on Solitude (1700) Pope wrote–
*"Happy the man, whose wish and care
 A few paternal acres bound
 Content to breathe his native air,
 In his own ground."*
- "Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady", a work written in heroic couplet which was published in 1717 is only 52 lines long, it became Pope's one of most celebrated pieces.
- Dr. Johnson translated Messiah in 1728 in Latin language. Pope's Messiah deals with Virgil's 4th eclogue which was said to predict the birth of Christ. Walter Jackson Bate praised this work and called it a "major effort".
- In 1715, after the Jacobite Rebellion, strict majors were taken against the Catholics so Pope moved from London to Twickenham and came to be called "Wasp of Twickenham".
- Voltaire said about Pope as– "The best Poet of England, and at present of all the world."

Imitations of Horace (1733)

Important Quote:

“Time was a sober Englishman would knock his servants up and rise by five o’clock, instructs his family in every rule, and send his wife to church, his son to school.”

Peri Bathous

- Peri Bathous is sub-titled ‘The Art of Sinking into Poetry’
- The main aim of this poem is to ridicule contemporary poets.
- It is a parody of Longinus’ “On the Sublime”.
- In this poem Pope introduced the term “Bathos”.
- This essay illustrates the lowest version of contemporary verse, the tendency for bathos and anti-climax, drawing upon his enemies as examples.

Windsor Forest (1713)

- This pastoral combines a celebration of the rustic character Albion with a political affirmation of the peace under Queen Anne.
- Describes the countryside around his house.
- Dr. Johnson called this kind of poetry as “local poetry”.

Essay on Man (1732-1734)

- It is a philosophical poem written in heroic couplets and published between 1732-1734.
- Pope intended this poem to be the centerpiece of a proposed system of ethics that was to be put forth in poetic form.
- It is an attempt to “Vindicate the ways of God to man” a variation on Milton’s attempt in Paradise Lost “to justify the ways of God to men”.
- The poem assumes that the man has fallen and must seek his salvation.
- It consists of four epistles that are addressed to Lord Bollingbroke.
- In this, Pope says that “no matter how imperfect, complex, inscrutable, and disturbing the universe appears to be, it functions in a rational fashion according to the natural laws”.
- Voltaire called this work “The most beautiful, the most useful, the most sublime, didactic poem ever written in any language.”
- Jean Pierre de Crousaz wrote a biting commentary on Essay on Man, where he found that Pope had “reserved a place for him in The Dunciad”.
- Dr. Johnson attacked Essay on Man in Life of Pope, “Never were penury of knowledge and vulgarity of sentiment so happily disguised.”

The Epistle to Doctor Arbuthnot (1735)

- It is a satire in poetic form addressed to John Arbuthnot, a physician, published in 1735. It was published along with Imitation of Horace.
- Dr. John Arbuthnot is the one who created the character John Bull.
- It is regarded as an autobiographical work of Pope in which he defends his practice on the genre of satire and attacks those who had been his opponents and rivals throughout his career.
- It is composed in heroic couplet.
- It is an introduction to the “Imitations”. It reviews his own literary career and includes the famous portraits of Lord Hervey as “Sporus” and Addison “Atticus”.

Important Quotes

“But to no pride, inheriting no strife

Nor marrying discord in a noble wife

Stranger to civil and religious rage

The good man walked innoxious through his age”

“Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?”

“Shut, shut the door, good John; fatigued I said,

Tie up the knocker, say I’m sick, I’m dead.”

“Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer, and without sneering teach the rest to sneer.”

“Willing to wound but yet afraid to strike”

Dunciad and Moral Essays

- 'Epistle to Burlington; on the subject of Architecture' is first of four poems grouped under title Moral Essays.
- The Dunciad is a satire published in three different versions at different time published in 1728 in 3 books.
First version – The "Three Book" Dunciad
Second version – Dunciad Veriorum
The fourth book was added in 'The New Dunciad' in 1743. It was a reply of Lewis Theobald and later Colley Cibber replaced Theobald.
- The Dunciad in four books is a revised version of first three books with a new character Tibbald. The third part never finished. Here he attacked Pedantry and Dullness as associated with boredom and sleep.

Important Quote:

"Thy hand great Dullness! Let's the curtain fall."

➤ Other Major Works of Pope

- Ode on Solitude or The Quite Life (1700)
- The Works of Shakespeare in Six Volumes
- Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady (1717)
- Peri Bathous: The Art of Sinking in Poetry
It is inspired by Longinus' On the Sublime
- Messiah (1712)
- Windsor Forest (1713)

➤ About Pope:

- *In Pope, I cannot read a line,
But with a sigh, I wish it mine:
When he can in one couplet fix
More sense than I can do in six:
It gives me such a jealous fit,
I cry, Pox take him, and his wit.*

Jonathan Swift, Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift (1731)

- *There are two ways of disliking poetry; one way is to dislike it, the other is to read Pope.*
Oscar Wilde
- Matthew Arnold called Dryden and Pope the "*classics of our prose.*"
- William J. Long writes: "*Pope is in many respects a unique figure. In the first place, he was for a generation 'the poet' of a great nation. To be sure, poetry was limited in the early eighteenth century; there were few lyrics, little or no love poetry, no epics, no dramas or songs of nautre worth considering; but in the narrow field of didactic and satiric verse Pope was the indisputed master. His influence dominated the poetry of his age, and many foreign writers, as well as the majority of English poets, looked to him as their model.*"